

ISRAEL
the
MIDDLE
EAST
and the
GREAT
POWERS

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ISLAM AND POLITICS

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Of late, religion has intruded in the politics of Muslim peoples as it had ceased to do for several decades. In a few years' time, the political discourse of very different societies and polities has come to be conducted in large part in a Muslim idiom, by regimes and oppositions alike.

If so broad a phenomenon could be traced to a single source, it is perhaps the acceleration of social and economic change and attendant dislocations. Otherwise, the circumstances surrounding the rise of a politicized Islam differ so thoroughly from locale to locale, as to thwart any narrower interpretation. The demand for a Muslim political order certainly is not the result of agitation by a few oil states, and could not be arrested simply by intimidating them. But neither was an Arab monarch candid when he offered that "the failure of Arab nationalism to confront Israel even to the extent of negotiating a Palestinian mini-state on the West Bank is a prime reason for the growth of such fundamentalist sentiments." His aim was to threaten that the "permanent loss of the West Bank would unleash the forces of religious and political extremism, leaving moderate regimes and aspirations in ruins." Here was another form of intimidation, amplifying Western apprehensions while offering a simple and utterly illusory relief. The return of Islam is far more complex a development, with many and diverse causes, beyond this facile explanation and promise of ready reversal. While aggravated by local and political confrontations, Muslim sensibilities first were stirred by the social challenges of modernity, and heightened by a deep-seated longing for authenticity.

Adherents of this creed throughout the world soon will number one billion. United in a single cause, they doubtless would constitute a force to be reckoned with in international affairs. The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which brings together representatives of over forty states in annual foreign ministerial and periodic summit conferences, was especially created to lend this force credibility in the international arena. The organization's professed aim, spelled out in its charter, is the promotion of political and economic solidarity among Muslims, on behalf of whom it pretends to speak authoritatively.

But a faith with so many adherents, spread across so wide a geographic expanse, cannot but suffer from tensions created by divisions within. Some of these divisions have historical depth, and date from the classical and medieval periods. Others are of fairly recent origin.

Muslims share one minimal religious belief, summarized by the Muslim profession of faith (*shahada*): There is but one God, and

Muhammad is his chosen prophet. But beyond this touchstone, Islam subsumes a variety of beliefs, sects, and schools. To all Muslims, the Quran is a revealed book; but like any sacred text, the Quran lends itself to an elasticity of interpretation, and the boundaries of that interpretation (*tafsir*) are still expanding. Even the mosque, symbol of Islam's communal spirit, embraces a boundless variety of architectural forms. Diversity within the universal collectivity is a preponderant theme in Muslim history, a thread that runs through all institutions under the encompassing rubric of Islam. This pluralism has led a North African intellectual, in a work entitled *The Islamic Commonwealth*, to speak not of an Islamic world but of Islamic worlds, and he identifies half a dozen. Others have divided Muslims into "demographic blocs" or "culture areas" with the same intent.

These divisions today are exacerbated by the lack of one great center in Islam. There is no single city, state, or body of theologians which enjoys undisputed primacy in determination of political priorities and religious doctrine. There are instead many centers, often exclusive in their claims, which pretend to speak on behalf of authentic Islam. The rivalry is keen, both within polities and among them. Who are the adversaries, and how do their versions compete?

The version viewed most sympathetically of late in the West has been the Egyptian, as formulated in a highly personal manner by Anwar al-Sadat. His Islam was a faith of moderation (*i'tidal*) and tolerance, of individual spirituality and peace. It was also a private Islam divorced from temporal concerns, in accord with Sadat's dictum: "No religion in politics, no politics in religion." And this was the ecumenical Islam that would have been represented in the place of worship for three faiths envisioned by Sadat for Mount Sinai, an Islam prepared to recognize Christianity and Judaism as equals. Sadat assured that this version bore not only his personal stamp, but that of Cairo's mosque-university, al-Azhar. The leading religious authorities of this institution lent their names to proclamations endorsing Sadat's major domestic policies and the peace with Israel. At the same time, the Egyptian regime advanced its own claim to primacy in Islam by stressing the supposed centrality of al-Azhar in the determination of Muslim dogma.

But was this magnanimous religion of peace normative? Did it set the standard of orthodoxy in Islam? Some within Egypt thought not, and they leveled accusations of irreligion against state and regime. These critics maintained that many of their government's policies were irreconcilable with authentic Islam, and that by endorsing them, the religious authorities of al-Azhar had forfeited their integrity. The Muslim Brotherhood in its several varieties, and a growing number of Islamic societies and associations, called especially for the imposition of Islamic law and a disengagement from the peace process. More extreme groups held that the necessary radical transformation could not be carried out simply by effecting such changes, and actively plotted the overthrow of the heretical state.

The growth within Egypt of an Islamic opposition did much to discredit Sadat's own religious vision among Muslims elsewhere,

and so disputed Egypt's pretension to primacy in Islam. Al-Azhar's endorsements were of limited effect. Al-Azhar enjoyed wide prestige as an educational institution and still drew students from afar, but the presence of the university in Cairo did not render Cairo the capital city of the faith. Nor did the theologians of al-Azhar enjoy any formal authority over Muslims beyond Egypt. Al-Azhar was an influential and renowned institution, but not an authoritative one, and held no license to regulate doctrine. This was not to say that Egyptian modernism, and its privatized concept of religion, had no adherents abroad. The ideas generated within Egyptian Islam continued to irradiate the wider world of Islam and appeal to all modernists of religious sensibility. But even these felt themselves under no obligation to repay such debts in political coin by embracing Egypt's insistent claim to hegemony.

One rival to the Egyptian version has been the Arabian, for Arabia contains the holiest cities of Islam, and so benefits from any tendency to assume that the form of faith which prevails at a place of pilgrimage is somehow normative. But did Mecca at any point in modern history overshadow Cairo? Arabia a century ago was divided into several Ottoman provinces, where settled life outside a few towns was precarious. As a seat of provincial administration, Mecca enjoyed some importance; as a religious and political center in a wider world, it enjoyed almost none. It was a British consul in the nearby village of Jidda in 1879, anxious to emphasize the importance of the far-flung post to which he had been dispatched, who first encouraged provincial notables to make extravagant claims about their moral and religious authority, and then reported these as fact. In the consul's dispatches, the chief notable of Ottoman Mecca became "for Mussulmans pretty well what the Pope is for the Roman Catholic Church." Mecca, to which the pilgrimage brought no more than a few thousand of the intrepid each year, became "the centre to which the ideas, opinions, sentiments and aspirations of the Mussulman world are brought for discussion."

Not long after the Saudis established themselves as rulers of Mecca in 1925, this contagious reverence for Arabia's rulers spread from the British Foreign Office to the US State Department. The Saudis began this century under the censure of about as wide a consensus as ever obtains among Muslims, on account of their ferocious intolerance and the exclusivism of their Wahhabi creed. Only with their seizure of the holy cities did a gradual process of reconciliation begin, and Ibn Saud soon had more credulous diplomats proclaiming him the hub of Islam.

This is evident in the description by William Eddy, first American minister to Saudi Arabia (1944-46), of the 1945 meeting between Roosevelt and Ibn Saud on the Great Bitter Lake: "The guardian of the Holy Places of Islam, and the nearest we have to a successor to the Caliphs, the Defender of the Muslim Faith and of the Holy Cities of three hundred million people, cemented a friendship with the head of a great Western and Christian nation. The meeting marks the high point of Muslim alliance with the West." An American understand-

ing with Saudi Arabia would, Eddy posited, do no less than assure "the friendship, the good will, and the resources of the three hundred million Muslims of the world. There are those who are bent upon taking this pearl of great price and hurling it to the bottom of the sea. If they succeed in that wanton and disloyal act, let them hope that the American people will some day forgive them; for they know not what they do."

A similar calculation of Saudi moral and religious authority — this time without Eddy's concluding insinuation — appeared in a 1956 White House Diary entry by Eisenhower, who suggested that the State Department conjure up an antidote to Nasser's malignant influence. "My own choice of such a rival is King Saud [Ibn Saud's successor]. I do not know the man, and therefore do not know whether he could be built up into the position I visualize. Nevertheless Arabia is a country that contains the holy places of the Moslem world, and the Saudi Arabians are considered to be the most deeply religious of all the Arab groups. Consequently, the King could be built up, possibly, as a spiritual leader. Once this were accomplished we might begin to urge his right to political leadership."

It only remained to convince Muslims of the explicit claims and implicit assumptions of this argument for Saudi primacy in Islam. For not all were as certain as the Eddys and Eisenhowers in matters of their own faith. Some acceded to the Saudi claim; some, even within the kingdom, openly sided with rival contestants.

Consider three rival varieties of Islam that recently appeared in rapid succession on the stage which is the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The Saudis and those who share Saudi assumptions commonly adduce possession of this site as evidence of Saudi centrality in Islam. In November 1979, the Saudis lost possession of the mosque for two weeks to a group of attackers with their own religious pretensions, who wholly rejected the Muslim credentials of the Saudi regime. The attackers' intention was to proclaim from within the sanctuary that the Saudi state was not an Islamic state, that Saudi Islam was not Islam, and that the Saudi king was the very farthest thing the Muslims had from a successor to the caliphs. They proclaimed their own leader a *mahdi*, and began to issue denunciations of the ruling house and the "whisky sheikhs" for their supposed deviation from Islam.

This criticism was uncomfortably reminiscent of the pristine fundamentalism of the early Saudi warrior-theologians. But Saudi spokesmen, with the aid of their own religious authorities, managed in their turn to depict the attackers as a band of deviants and heretics. At issue in the ensuing two-week battle, which the Saudis attempted to conceal from all prying eyes, was the question of who embodied an uncorrupted Islam. The physical confrontation was eventually won by the regime, which then executed sixty-three of the surviving attackers. Yet the incident had revealed that the Saudis, despite their insistence that their cause and that of Islam were identical, faced reservoirs of religious opposition even within their own territory. Their embarrassed religious authority was not beyond challenge.

The Saudis acted to erase the traces of the attack, both on the structure of the mosque and on their image. In January 1981, the Saudis themselves prepared the Grand Mosque as a stage for an Islamic summit conference organized under their auspices and those of the OIC. The point of the event was to convey the impression that the Saudis did possess that Muslim primacy which they claimed and that, on important issues, they could deliver or withhold the assent of all Islam. Now the television cameras were invited into the cleansed mosque, to transmit images of representatives of almost all Muslim states led in prayer by Saudi King Khalid. This event left a former French ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Georges de Bouteiller, among those who were convinced once again of the unique Saudi capacity for transcending the differences within Islam. "What a colorful spectacle the world of Islam is!" he gushed in an article. "For a whole hour I watched it parading on the screen of Saudi television.... The way we others, we Westerners, impenitent Cartesians, look upon Islam makes us inclined to concentrate on the divisions in it. But let us mistrust our penchant for rationality. Much more so than the laic and materialistic West, Islam can withstand the apparent contradictions of unity amid diversity, even amid division. This is due to the living adhesion of a billion human beings to one and the same faith and one and the same culture, with all that this means for possibilities of contact in crises, rapprochements, connivances, compromises, and mediations." And the sole mediators between this great bloc of one billion and the West were the Saudis, whose kingdom and ethic were ordered by the most authentic version of the one Islam.

Yet in October 1981, another variety of Islam made Mecca once again a place of strife. During the pilgrimage season, 75,000 Iranian Muslims arrived in Mecca, and brought with them their single-minded devotion to Ayatollah Khomeini and his revolutionary policies. This, too, found expression in the holy sanctuary. Among the obligations of the pilgrimage is the circumambulation (*tawaf*) of the Ka'ba, the great hollow black stone in the center of Mecca's Grand Mosque. Large groups of Iranian pilgrims transformed the ritual into a demonstration, by marching around the Ka'ba with arms raised and chanting slogans against Israel and the United States. The Saudis were taken aback by repeated violent confrontations between unruly pilgrims and security authorities.

King Khalid discreetly wrote to Ayatollah Khomeini asking that he restrain Iranian pilgrims; Khomeini publicly replied with a bruising critique of Saudi guardianship over the holy shrines, accusing the Saudis of arresting and torturing pilgrims and committing "crimes" in the holy mosques. When the Saudi interior ministry urged all pilgrims to "devote themselves exclusively to God in these blessed days in order to worship, submit to God, and beg his forgiveness," the Iranian ministry of religious guidance intervened with a provocative challenge: "Is it not possible that there are some Muslims in Iran and in other countries who may have certain concepts about the pilgrimage and the pilgrims' tasks contrary to your assertions? Is it not possible that a large number of the Muslims hold the belief that

the pilgrimage, in addition to prayer and humility, within the concept that you have, has also other important social concepts?" Many Muslims felt it was "their religious and divine duty" to chant "death to Israel, death to Israel-promoting America, and death to the anti-Islamic superpowers." "Do you consider it fair that Muslims who do not share your views concerning the pilgrimage ought to abandon their own beliefs without question and give up their religious duties? Holy Mecca belongs to all Muslims and is not a monopoly of a particular group." These themes were reiterated in September 1982, with the outbreak of similar disorders during the pilgrimage.

There could be no more direct challenge to the Saudi claim to speak on behalf of all Muslims. Across the Gulf was poised a rival claimant to religious authority who captured the same stage on which the Saudis, ten months earlier, had attempted to demonstrate their own undisputed supremacy.

The Saudis have not despaired of making their vision of Islam the vision of other Muslims. Theirs is an Islam that does carry beyond the borders of one state, because some of its features are compelling, and because the Saudis are willing to fund efforts abroad to cultivate their Islam among others. But the Saudis, despite their pretensions, cannot yet define Islam for one billion people. Nor can they deliver "the friendship, the good will, and the resources" of all Muslims. Beyond their frontiers, they enjoy in some places a great deal of influence, but no authority.

The Iranian claim to primacy in Islam is the newest, the shrillest, and the most insistent of all claims. For the founders of the Islamic republic, the message of Islamic revolution is of universal validity, and the establishment of the new Islamic republic but a harbinger. Revolutionary Islam would displace complacent Islam in a wave of spontaneous emulation.

"Islamic governments have one billion people and underground resources," reflected Khomeini, "especially torrents of oil which is the lifeline of the superpowers." In Khomeini's view, this billion is Iran's potential constituency, and Iran's mission is of global portent: "In Iran we have risen, with the assistance of the Almighty, in order to bring Muslims of the world under the banner of monotheism, to ensure their commitment to the progressive teachings of Islam, to cut the hands of the superpowers from Islamic countries, to restore the glory of the Muslims of the early days of Islam, to wipe out the tyrannical dominance of the infidels over Islamic lands and to restore freedom and independence to the Muslims." Join us, Khomeini appealed to Muslims everywhere. It was not Iran's aim to "export the revolution," said Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini's presumed successor, but to "introduce the revolution," to awaken Muslims elsewhere to the truth that "our revolution is Islam." Iran's task, elaborated in its new constitution, is nothing less than the achievement of "the political, economic and cultural unity of the Islamic world."

But this assertion of Iran's claim is so brash and insistent precisely

because it goes against the grain. A millennium has passed since Iran played a role in Islam comparable to that which its leaders now claim for it. In a remote past, Iran displayed ample intellectual vigor to recast Islam in matters of theology, philosophy, political theory, science, and literature. But Iranian primacy in Islam did not survive the Middle Ages, and independent Iran as finally reconstituted in the sixteenth century was Shi'i by law.

Now, however complex were the origins of Shi'ism as a sect, the historical effects of the division were self-evident, as Shi'is and other Muslims traditionally regarded their differences as fundamental, to the point of mutual exclusion from the community of Islam. The development of Shi'ism thus followed a lone course, as a distinct faith within a faith. Iran's sudden pretension to centrality is rooted in no tradition of centrality, only in an uneven influence dependent upon whatever enthusiasm the immediate policies of the revolution and Khomeini's person manage to generate.

Those parts of Khomeini's doctrine which resonated in the wider Muslim world during Khomeini's rise to power in the late 1970s were his insistence on authenticity and personal integrity, and for a moment he seemed to stand uncontested at the vanguard of Islam. But the naive enthusiasms of the halcyon days soon subsided. Within Iran itself there were rival versions of Islam, some engaged in violent vendettas with one another. There was the clericalist interpretation, holding that Iran should be run as a hierarchy. The necessity of rule by clerics was the principal argument of Ayatollah Khomeini's tract on Islamic government, and was the central plank in the platform of the ruling Islamic Republican Party.

But to triumph, this doctrine first had to overwhelm the view advocated by Ayatollah Shari'atmadari, Iran's preeminent theologian before the revolution, who held that clerics should advise but not exercise authority, a conviction shared by many lay Muslim theoreticians of the revolution. Once asked whether he entertained political ambitions, Shari'atmadari replied: "You might as well ask me if I'm going to open a shop in the bazaar. Being a merchant is a job. Being a politician is a job. But it's not my job." Shari'atmadari thus invited denunciation by the clericalist faction as a doubter, and ended up under virtual house arrest.

Then there were those who combined Muslim and radical populist allegiances in a violently anti-clericalist position, and who bore responsibility for the slayings of leading religious figures, all in the cause of Islam. The clerics, maintained Mujahidin-i Khalq leader Mas'ud Rajavi, were guilty of distorting Islam, for "real Islam must be nationalistic, democratic, and progressive. It must not be opposed to civilization and science." The Mujahidin-i Khalq looked not to Khomeini's tract on Islamic government, but to the writings of 'Ali Shari'ati, an Iranian lecturer and author who died before the revolution under suspicious circumstances. His works on Islam, acclaimed as highly original by his adepts, were essentially distillations of sociological and psychological theories absorbed at the Sorbonne while he pursued his doctorate. The combination of Quranic citations and references to French philosophers and orien-

talists signaled a profound intellectual confusion. Yet this enigmatic vision was one that continued to move men to total commitment, and to acts of violent resistance that brought upon them a fierce retaliation. In the first three years of the revolution, the Iranian government announced 4,400 executions.

As the revolution took hold and one version of Islam was made to prevail in Iran, through genuine appeal and intimidation, its advocates thought to diffuse it abroad. In Iranian publications in Arabic, written for a readership in neighboring countries, Khomeini came to bear the title *imam al-umma al-islamiyya*, the spiritual and temporal leader of the nation of Islam. This constituted a new claim to authority, audacious and sweeping in scope. It had some impact among the Shi'is of neighboring countries, some of whom had a tradition of looking to Iran for spiritual and temporal guidance. But the effect was uneven. Among Iraqi Shi'is, the Iranian revolution found a substantial passive following that served as fertile ground for active pro-Iranian agitation.

But the confessions of an Iranian emissary to Lebanon evidenced that even Shi'is might withhold their allegiance, if they sensed no identity of interests with Iran. "I was once given 10 million liras and instructed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Council to help the deprived people of South Lebanon, and proceeded to Lebanon." There, "after months of trying to make some kind of agreement," a representative of Lebanon's Supreme Shi'i Council "refused to sign one simply because the name of the Islamic Republic of Iran appeared on it." "These mercenaries are trying to limit the leadership of the Imam Khomeini within Iran," charged the emissary in conclusion. Within this Shi'i faith within a faith, Iran's pretension to primacy was not uncontested.

The revolution did find enthusiasts in the wider Muslim world, among those inclined to regard the most aggressive formulation of Islam as normative. But the sanguinary settling of scores in Iran disillusioned even these. 'Umar al-Talmasani, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, repented his own error of judgement: "When Khomeini declared the revolution we supported him despite the radical difference in faith between Shi'is and Sunnis. We supported him because the people had been savagely wronged by their ruler. I thought that the massacres and serious situation (now) in Iran were being exaggerated. But those I trust fully have affirmed that what is published in the press is true. I don't approve of this. God's law is not being implemented in Iran. The violence taking place in Iran is not part of Islam." The Iranian revolution, despite a promising beginning, had gone astray, and Islam once again had been corrupted.

The Saudi position was summarized in a broadcasted commentary: "Those who have betrayed the trust of Islam in Teheran are today squatting on the ruins of Iran — land and man — just like owls which inhabit ruins. They talk about Islam, while Islam has washed its hands of them. This is because their shameful actions and their brazen practices place them as far as possible from Islam; it is also because Islam is a system of ethics, behavior, and values, and the ignorant gang in Teheran recognizes none of these. It is in the shadow

of a personality cult and deifies the symbols of idolatry and dissension that are leading Iran to the brink of the abyss." These amounted to declarations of excommunication.

The criticism distressed Iranians, usually so intractably convinced of the righteousness of their cause. It could only be their own failure to explain their revolution, so they reasoned, which accounted for the unsettling isolation of Iran within the wider Muslim world, which the revolution's exploits were to have inspired. "We lack proper propaganda," concluded Khomeini. The revolution was a casualty of bad publicity, and had failed to communicate its authentically Islamic essence to Muslims elsewhere.

On the third anniversary of the revolution, when it no longer seemed likely that Iran's example would find spontaneous emulation in even one other state, Khomeini appointed a coordinator for foreign propaganda. Not inappropriately, the post went to Iran's minister of Islamic guidance, for the effort was to be directed in large part toward wavering Muslim sympathizers abroad. The periodical literature and radio propaganda in all Muslim languages that now issued from Teheran constituted an admission that example did not suffice. If Iran did not aggressively assert its claim to primacy in Islam, none would concede it.

The leading theme in this campaign was the insistent denial that differences between Sunnis and Shi'is were fundamental. Sectarianism, Teheran's Arabic radio proclaimed repeatedly, was an "imperialist-Zionist" conspiracy. This was of course a patent fiction, manufactured to console Iranians in their solitude. For Iran was burdened with a tradition of particularism and marginality. The response to Iran's bid for primacy among Muslims elsewhere was bound up in a knot of historical and cultural prejudices, a knot tightened yet further by revulsion at the revolution's excesses. Three years after the creation of an Islamic republic, Iran's pretension to ascendancy was no more credible, and no less vulnerable, than those of its rivals. It was simply more blatant.

Perhaps the boldest contestant has been Libya, an unlikely entity of considerable weight in the world oil market and of inverse importance to the historical evolution of Islam. Mu'ammār al-Qadhafi, himself without a formal religious education, has enforced a highly personal brand of Islam as state doctrine, offering his theological insights on the occasions of religious festivals and in a published tract. His is a highly eclectic dogma of Islam as the embodiment of true socialism, an idea elaborated in his Green Book, a record of his inspirations that attests to an overwrought religious sensibility and a haphazard exposure to radical modes of Western thought.

To lend credibility to his voice in matters of theology, Mu'ammār al-Qadhafi, in the course of 1978, advanced a series of unconventional precepts designed to cast him in the role of an inspired visionary. He declared one of the traditional sources of Islamic law—the major canonical collections of the Prophet Muhammad's deeds and sayings—to be unreliable and invalid, and so dismissed a centuries-long legacy of jurisprudence. Instead, he argued for a strict

scripturalism reliant solely upon his interpretation of the text of the Quran. He then sharply rebuked Muslim clerics for their pedantic legalism, which had distanced the masses from their faith. And he rejected the dating of the Islamic calendar from the Prophet's passage (*hijra*) from Mecca to Madina, preferring the later date of Muhammad's death. Libyan official correspondence thereafter bore an Islamic date a decade at variance with the date current in every other quarter of the Muslim world.

Here was an obvious bid for hegemony. By a series of shocking *ex cathedra* pronouncements, Mu'ammār al-Qadhafī sought to establish himself as a religious medium, fired by a vision born of profound spirituality and perhaps—who could tell?—divine inspiration.

To explain Libya's Islamic mission to Muslims elsewhere, the Libyan government sponsored the Islamic Call Society, an organization entrusted with carrying Qadhafī's word to those Muslims susceptible to a revolutionary appeal. Qadhafī claimed that thousands of Muslims everywhere were prepared to volunteer to serve Libya, because "everyone who believes in God, who is eager to protect the faith, who wishes to see that the faith is ultimately the victor, wants to place himself at the disposal of Libya. He wants to volunteer to fight alongside Libya with weapons."

There is little evidence that Qadhafī's radical theories and his view of Libya as defender of the faith have won many Muslim minds or volunteers beyond Libya. The Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians did choose Libya for a time as principal partner in its dialogue with Islam, apparently thinking that Qadhafī represented some significant trend in Islam, even as religious authorities in Egypt and Saudi Arabia denounced him as an unschooled schismatic. These accusations, while clearly echoing a political squabble between rival regimes, should nevertheless have been sufficient to alert the Vatican that Qadhafī's claim to represent the elusive one billion in any dialogue was a pretension.

Finally, there is a variety of Muslim political expression that is essentially defensive. It has been embraced by secular regimes that are bereft of any Muslim claim to primacy, and that draw instead upon other sources of legitimacy. Some of these regimes, faced with militant Muslim opposition, have been compelled to compromise principle and manufacture responses couched in an expressly Muslim vocabulary. This has produced the defensive Islam advanced separately by the Syrian and Iraqi regimes.

The rulers of Syria cannot draw freely on the reservoir of Muslim allegiances in their polity. Hafiz al-Asad, who rose to the presidency through military *coup* and coercion, belongs to the 'Alawi sect. Now the 'Alawis are a compact minority centered in northwestern Syria, and adhere to an eclectic creed believed by many of their Muslim neighbors to be outside the confines of Islam. On theological grounds, the issue can be argued either way, and has been so argued, without bringing the matter any closer to resolution. In a secular state, this sort of sectarian affiliation would constitute no bar to political participation, and Asad in fact built his regime on the secular foundations of Arabism and socialism.

But in an era of rekindled Muslim awareness, those Syrians opposed to Asad's policies and personal rule could not but make an issue of his 'Alawi affiliation. They spread doubt as to Asad's credentials as a Muslim, and as to whether he ruled Syria on behalf of the Muslim majority or his own sect. The Muslim Brotherhood, organized in Syria in clandestine cells, became the natural vehicle for this protest, which combined political aims and primordial prejudices.

To defuse this movement, Asad went to some lengths. Again and again he declared himself a believing Muslim. Qurans were published bearing his photograph. He prayed in public. Muslim religious dignitaries were patronized. And these manufactured an Islam that accommodated all of the regime's domestic and foreign policies, an Islam that in large part was the handiwork of the Grand Mufti in Damascus. During one of his many visits to the Soviet Union, he had the occasion to deliver a talk on Islam. "If Islam is as you have presented it to us," responded an enthusiastic Soviet listener, "it really is a good thing." One can rest assured that this hybrid doctrine, embracing socialism, Arabism, and a Soviet alliance, would have been indecipherable to those learned theologians of Damascus over forty years ago, from whom the Grand Mufti first received his license to teach. Nor did it satisfy those who, in the name of another Islam, joined the Muslim Brotherhood in the February 1981 Hama insurrection, which was suppressed so ruthlessly by the regime.

A similar dilemma faced Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. His, too, was a secular regime that emphasized the secular values of Arabism and socialism. It was therefore convenient for Iran to condemn Saddam as an "infidel," an "unbeliever," and a "traitor to Islam," once Iran and Iraq were locked in war. There was no better evidence for the effectiveness of these charges, particularly within Iraq's large Shi'i community, than the countercampaign launched by the regime. Saddam began to cultivate Iraqi religious figures, especially the Shi'i clergy of Najaf, who then denounced Khomeini's vision of Islam as false. Then Saddam himself was revealed to be a direct descendant of Husayn ibn 'Ali, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and a traditional object of Shi'i veneration. In Iraq's cause, Saddam claimed to have enlisted Muslim volunteers from as far afield as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. For if Iran were to wage a holy war, a *jihad*, against Iraq, then Iraq would wage a similar war. Whether this gambit has succeeded or failed still cannot be determined. But what was significant in the case of Iraq, as well as that of Syria, was the compromise of secular principles, and the desperate resort to the Muslim form of political discourse.

These are the principal adversaries in a conflict that has rent the fabric of the faith. A heightened religious awareness, far from uniting all Muslims in a common cause, has precipitated a deadlocked struggle for hegemony in their divided world. This is an eclectic faith without a definitive orthodoxy or the institutions needed to create one. And while the parameters of Muslim belief have always been

elastic, in this last decade they have expanded so rapidly that even millenarians appear to fall well within their confines.

Now, were a regime or opposition movement identified with one version of Islam to achieve a success that had eluded others, it then would secure an advantage over all rivals. This goes far to explain the emergence of Jerusalem and Palestine as Islamic causes. "There are one billion Muslims in the world," the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem recently echoed once again. "Our places here in Jerusalem are holy to all of them. The most important of these is the al-Aqsa Mosque, because the Holy Quran says that God sent the Prophet Muhammad to Jerusalem and God blessed al-Aqsa. For any Muslim, praying at al-Aqsa is equal to five hundred prayers anywhere else."

It is of course for Muslims alone to determine the standing of Jerusalem in their creed, and a genuine sentiment is indeed attached to the city. There are also historical and textual arguments for Jerusalem's sanctity in Islam. But many of the commitments to the liberation of Jerusalem expressed in an Islamic idiom are clearly bids for hegemony. From the despair of division, the belief has emerged that the key to primacy in Islam is Jerusalem, and that he who liberates it will then command the gratitude and allegiance of all. So all are committed in some manner to the Muslim causes of Palestine and Jerusalem. The Egyptians would secure Jerusalem through negotiation, the Saudis through guile, the Iranians and Libyans through juggernaut. Each damns the other's tactics as incompatible with the true tenets of Islam, and all verse their own commitments in a pious idiom. It is this rivalry which has much amplified the traditional Muslim veneration of Jerusalem.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has not remained outside this contest. It has sought assiduously to make support for its cause, and hence its policies, a religious obligation. This returns us again to the Grand Mosque at Mecca. In 1974, Sadat and Qadhafi traveled together to an Islamic summit conference in Pakistan, and stopped enroute at Mecca to perform the minor pilgrimage (*'umra*). They both entered the Ka'ba, as Sadat recalled. "Suddenly, Qadhafi held my hand, placed another hand on it and then placed his hand on top. I said to him while we were inside the Ka'ba: What is this, Mu'ammarr? He said: We must all make a pledge. I said: And who is this man who is with us? He said: He is the Fatah representative. I did not know the man; he could have been someone else. I said with surprise: Pledge what? He said: To support the Palestine cause. I said: Does this require a pledge? Is there any disagreement on this? Has anybody worked harder for this cause than we? We pledged to protect Palestine with al-Qadhafi, and with the Fatah representative, whom I still don't know."

Why should a representative of the PLO have sought such a demonstrative oath, unless his superiors were uneasy about the conventional political commitments made to them by their erstwhile allies? With the sharpening of Muslim self-awareness, the PLO sought to give its struggle a specifically Muslim character, and so ride upon the crest of the wave. The incident of the oath, then, was not an isolated one. There was the PLO's initial courting of Islamic

Iran, an affair which ended badly. And during the opening ceremony of the 1981 Islamic summit conference in Mecca, there was a moment of reckoning in the Great Mosque, when PLO Chairman Yasir 'Arafat pressed for the swearing of a collective oath by Muslim delegation heads, binding them to afford all means to liberate Jerusalem. This time, however, Saudi King Khalid managed to dissuade him. According to Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faysal, "there was a proposal on the liberation of Jerusalem at the opening session of the Islamic summit conference in the Mecca mosque. King Khalid asserted to the PLO leader that the meeting of Muslims near the Ka'ba in the House of God in a conference designated as the Palestine and Jerusalem conference is [already] a binding pledge to liberate holy Jerusalem... I believe that the whole conference represents a pledge by Muslims to liberate Jerusalem."

And so 'Arafat did not secure his vow. Instead he left the conference with a long list of fortifying resolutions formally expressing the collective intentions of Muslim states and their peoples. Muslim states promised "all their military, political and economic potential and their natural resources, including oil, as an effective means to back the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people." "We pledge a *jihad* with the means we possess for the liberation of Jerusalem."

Little more than a year later, these vouchers proved worthless during the ordeal of Beirut, but for the grudging offers of asylum. During the summer 1982 siege, 'Arafat appealed for an emergency summit conference that would have reminded Muslim states of the commitments undertaken the previous year. But the necessary quorum could not be gathered. 'Arafat wired the secretary-general of the Muslim body, expressing his "surprise" at the decision not to make preparations for a summit with less than the required quorum, given the dire situation of Beirut. "I am still waiting for practical steps on your part under the present bitter circumstances. This is a revolution until victory." But the appeal went unheeded.